

CONFORMITY AND ATTRACTION 1

A critical test of the assumption that men prefer conformist women and women prefer nonconformist men

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Abstract

Five studies tested the common assumption that women prefer nonconformist men as romantic partners, whereas men prefer conformist women. Studies 1 and 2 showed that both men and women preferred nonconformist romantic partners, but women over-estimated the extent to which men prefer conformist partners. In Study 3 participants ostensibly in a small group interaction showed preferences for nonconformist opposite-sex targets, a pattern that was particularly evident when men evaluated women. Dating success was greater the more non-conformist the sample (Study 4) and perceptions of non-conformity in an ex-partner was associated with greater love and attraction toward that partner (Study 5). On the minority of occasions in which effects were moderated by gender it was in the reverse direction to the traditional wisdom: conformity was more associated with dating success among men. The studies contradict the notion that men disproportionately prefer conformist women.

KEY WORDS: conformity; non-conformity; social role theory; gender; interpersonal attraction

A critical test of the assumption that men prefer conformist women and women prefer nonconformist men

Pride and Prejudice opens with the line: “It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife.” In lesser-quoted sections of the book, however, it becomes clear that it is not *any* sort of wife he wants. Jane, the second eldest daughter of the Bennett family, is the archetypal female conformist. She gently acquiesces to the wants and needs of those around her. Her father teases her, stating: “You are... so complying, that nothing will ever be resolved on...”. Her mother anticipates a successful and lucrative marriage for the demure and deferring Jane, who teams beauty with the ability to be a good “follower”. Elizabeth, the eldest daughter, is also pretty. In contrast to Jane, however, Elizabeth is headstrong and nonconformist, consistently flying in the face of convention. Her mother is aware that this personality trait will detract male suitors, stating: “She is a very headstrong foolish girl, and does not know her own interest”. To her mother, Elizabeth’s matrimonial prospects seem bleak because of her nonconformist nature. But who do men really want: Elizabeth or Jane?

If one were to draw exclusively on the psychological literature, one would probably agree with Mrs Bennett that it is the conformist Jane who would be more likely to attract men. For example, studies have found that women conform more when their mating drives are primed (Griskevicius, Goldstein, Mortensen, Cialdini, & Kenrick, 2006), that attractive women report higher levels of conformity (see Segal-Caspi, Roccas, & Sagiv, 2012), and that (unlike men) women do *not* try to separate themselves from the crowd in the presence of an attractive, opposite sex audience (Van Vugt & Iredale, 2013). Interestingly, though, the assumption that traits of (non)conformity have different effects on men and women when

choosing opposite-sex partners has never been directly tested, and it is the goal of this paper to fill this gap.

Sharpening our theoretical understanding of the link between conformity traits and attraction is not just of theoretical relevance but has applied importance as well. Relationship success is a key driver of overall health and happiness (Stack & Eshleman, 1998), especially for women (Weiss & Aved, 1978), and failing to attract a partner is associated with low subjective wellbeing (Dush & Amato, 2005). Thus, establishing factors that members of the opposite sex find attractive is of practical importance to single heterosexual people, as well as of theoretical importance to researchers. If it is true that men prefer conformity and women prefer non-conformity in their romantic partners, then this would have implications for how they should present themselves in courting situations. If this assumed wisdom turns out *not* to be true, then it suggests that many people might be engaging in impression-management strategies that are ineffective; or even worse, counter-productive.

Human Mate Preferences and Conformity

The most focused examination of mate preferences as a function of conformity was conducted by Griskevicius and colleagues (2006). They used a priming paradigm to induce two motives that are fundamental to survival: self-protection and mate attraction. Mate attraction was primed by asking people to imagine spending a romantic day with an attractive stranger. After the prime, conformity was measured by testing the extent to which participants deferred to others' opinions in an online task. Results showed that both sexes conformed more when primed with self-protection goals. When primed with mate attraction motives, however, men were significantly less likely to conform, especially when nonconformity made them appear unique and independent. In contrast, women were significantly *more* likely to conform when primed to attract a mate.

Griskevicius and colleagues (2006) interpreted their data as a reflection of a sensible mating strategy. They posited that it is important for men to distinguish themselves from potential rivals when trying to attract a female mate, and that nonconformity is one way to do so. Evolutionary literature demonstrates that nonconformity can communicate social dominance, willingness to take risks, and assertiveness; all traits that are preferred by females when selecting mating partners (Bassett & Moss, 2004; Buss, 2001; Kelly & Dunbar, 2001; Sadalla, Kenrick, & Vershure, 1987). These traits are often associated with good earning potential and higher social status; people who are successful may have achieved their success due to their risk-taking and assertive behaviors (Brauer & Bourhis, 2006; MacCrimmon & Wehrung, 1990), and people with high social status often have greater social liberty to freely express their opinions (Bassett & Moss, 2004; Buss, 2001; Sadalla et al., 1987). Thus, nonconformity should help men attract women.

In contrast, it was argued by Griskevicius and colleagues that men are primed to seek different qualities in women. The authors stated: "... traits that men prefer in a mate focus less on social dominance and more on ... the mate's ability to facilitate group cohesion (Campbell, 2002). Not only may the successful display of these traits be undermined by going against the group, but conforming more to the group may actually lead a woman to appear more agreeable while facilitating group cohesiveness" (Griskevicius et al., 2006, p.283). According to this rationale, women can make themselves more attractive to men by conforming.

The fact that men behaved in a less conformist way and women behaved in a more conformist way after a mating prime can also be explained using social role theory. Social role theory (Eagly, 1987; Eagly & Wood, 1999) proposes that, due to historical divisions of labor, men and women exhibit sex-specific behaviors as a product of the different roles they embody. For example, women are perceived to be more communal than men because they

have traditionally held caregiving roles within families. Over time these social roles have developed into gender roles that denote how men and women are expected to behave. This has resulted in masculine gender roles associated with agentic qualities for men, and communal qualities for women (Wood & Eagley, 2002). These gender roles subsequently act to endorse and confirm the gender stereotypes held about men and women (Eagly, 1987; Eagly & Steffen, 1984). Further, it is argued that people prefer partners with characteristics that are consistent with the typical gender roles of men and women in society. When trying to attract a mate, both men and women would be expected to strategically exhibit behaviors that are consistent with their social roles. For men this might involve acting in an independent and nonconformist fashion, whereas for women it might involve acting in an interdependent and conformist fashion.

Prior research has not directly examined mate preferences for conformity, but for the sake of thoroughness below we review studies that have examined constructs that can be considered to be broadly associated with conformity, such as “niceness” and agreeableness. Urbaniak and Kilmann (2003) examined the ‘nice guy’ stereotype, which proposes that some women report a desire to date nice guys, but in fact prefer dating men who are highly masculine and insensitive (or “jerks”). They found that physical attractiveness and niceness (operationalized as being emotionally expressive, attentive, and kind) were both positive factors in women’s reported mate preferences, and niceness was particularly valued in the context of long-term relationships. However, in the context of casual sexual relationships, niceness was less influential, lending partial support to the ‘nice guy’ stereotype.

A follow-up study examined agreeableness, measured using a scale that incorporates a broad range of dimensions such as being sensitive, kind, obliging, cooperative (in the high ends of the scale), and tough, assertive, aggressive, cold, and opinionated (in the lower ends of the scale). Males who reported low levels of agreeableness reported greater dating success

in the context of short-term and superficial relationships than agreeable males (Urbaniak & Kilmann, 2006). There was no relationship between agreeableness and success in committed romantic relationships, however. Note that these studies only focused on female preferences for male targets, and so it is not possible to tell whether men had similar preferences for women. Furthermore, we emphasize that agreeableness is a clearly distinct construct from conformity, meaning that the answer to our key question cannot be distilled from past literature.

Summary of Present Research

In the five studies that follow we take a broad definition of conformity and nonconformity, incorporating measures and manipulations that include standing out from the crowd, emphasizing uniqueness, and sticking to opinions in the face of pressure from others. Further, we take into account a variety of different perspectives in terms of romantic success. Study 1 examined participants' stated mate preferences using a self-report questionnaire measuring attitudes towards conformist and nonconformist characteristics in romantic partners. In Studies 2 and 3 we focused on revealed mate preferences. In Study 2, participants were exposed to dating profiles that varied systematically in the extent to which the target self-described as conformist or nonconformist. Study 3 examined how conformity and nonconformity on ratings of art affected the perceived attractiveness of an opposite-sex target in an (ostensibly) live, small-group interaction. Finally, Studies 4 and 5 tested whether the results of the first three studies were likely to reflect mate value and preferences outside the laboratory.

Study 1

In Study 1, participants reported how attractive they found conformity characteristics in potential romantic partners. The questionnaire also examined participants' ideas about the characteristics that *other* men and women would find attractive in mating partners.

Participants therefore responded to the mate preferences for conformity scale from three perspectives: their personal mate preferences, their ideas about the mate preferences of most men, and their ideas about the mate preferences of most women.

On the basis of the literature discussed earlier, a case can be built that men will prefer conformist women and women will prefer non-conformist men. A secondary research question concerns the differences between people's own mate preferences and people's beliefs about the preferences of others. The research of Griskevicius and colleagues (2006) suggests that male and female participants will report that men are attracted to conformity characteristics and women are attracted to nonconformity characteristics. By examining both the reality of attraction (what men and women prefer) and the stereotypes of attraction (what people *think* men and women prefer) we are able to gauge the extent to which beliefs are synchronous with, or dissociated from, reality.

Method

Participants

Seventy-four Caucasian undergraduate students (62% female) were recruited for this study. All participants were heterosexual, and ranged from 17 to 28 years old ($M_{age}=20.36$).

Materials and Procedure

Participants were instructed to imagine they were single and wanted to start dating, and were presented with 39 items designed to assess mate preferences for conformity behaviors. In the first 13 items, participants rated how romantically attractive they found someone of the opposite gender who had certain characteristics. Items covered two dimensions of behaviors associated with conformity (fitting in with others) and nonconformity (standing out from others). Example items include: "How romantically attractive do you find a man (woman) who likes to stand out from his (her) friends?" and "How romantically attractive do you find a man (woman) who modifies his (her) opinions or

beliefs to create harmony?” Males and females received identical questionnaires, with only the gender of the target varying.

After recording their own preferences, participants reported how attractive other *people of their own gender* would find the 13 characteristics, and how attractive *people of the opposite gender* would find the 13 characteristics. For example, male participants were asked: “Generally, how attractive do you think other men find a woman who likes to stand out from her friends?” and “Generally, how attractive do you think a woman would find a man who likes to stand out from his friends?”

All items used a 7-point scale (1=*very unattractive*, 7=*very attractive*). Factor analyses conducted within each response set showed that items were best represented by one factor. Thus, means were calculated such that each participant received a score for their own preferences, a score for what they believed other men would prefer, and a score for what they believed other women would prefer (all α s > .70). The scales were calculated such that higher scores indicated preference for romantic partners who conform, whereas lower scores indicated preference for nonconformist partners.

Results and Discussion

A 2 (participant gender) x 3 (rating perspective) mixed-measures ANOVA was performed. The within-subjects factor was the perspective from which ratings were made (i.e., own preferences, beliefs about the preferences of men, and beliefs about the preferences of women). Means are summarized in Table 1.

Significant differences emerged across the three perspectives from which ratings were made, $F(2,68)=14.12$, $p<.001$, $\eta_p^2=.29$. Participants’ own preferences for conformity characteristics ($M=3.39$) were significantly lower than participants’ ratings of how attractive they thought women would find conformity characteristics ($M=3.76$, $p=.006$, $CI[.085-.499]$), which in turn were significantly lower than participants’ ratings of how attractive they

thought men would find conformity characteristics ($M=4.01$, $p=.001$, $CI[.136-.541]$).

However, there was no significant difference between the ratings of male and female participants overall, $F(1,69)=0.40$, $p=.53$, $\eta_p^2=.01$, and the interaction between the rating perspective and participant gender was also not significant, $F(2,68)=1.10$, $p=.34$, $\eta_p^2=.02$.

In sum, both men and women showed a preference for nonconformity relative to what they thought other men or women would prefer. Further, both endorsed the stereotype that, relative to women, men would prefer conformist partners. In sum, there is a discrepancy between perception and reality: People *think* that men prefer conformist women and that women prefer nonconformist men, when in fact both men *and* women report being most attracted to nonconformist targets.

Study 2

In Study 1 we focused on participants' *stated* ideal partner preference – that is, what participants think and report that they want in a partner. However, *revealed* partner preference (that is, what people actually choose in a partner) is often at odds with stated preference. For example, women report earning prospects as being more important in a potential mate than do men, and conversely men report focusing more on physical appearance than do women. However, a recent meta-analysis demonstrates that in contrast to stated preferences, both men and women reveal a similar sized preference for physically attractive people with good earning potential (Eastwick, Luchies, Finkel & Hunt, 2014). Revealed preferences, then, can provide a more authentic portrait of people's real-world choices (see also Wood & Brumbaugh, 2009). As such, in Study 1 it is possible that while both women *and* men think that they prefer a non-conformist partner, their revealed preferences might still indicate a more traditional sex-differentiated pattern. Accordingly, we aimed to test this possibility by switching to an experimental, revealed preferences paradigm in Study 2. Study

2 further improves on Study 1 by (a) using a broader range of dimensions of (non)conformity, and (b) couching the target information in a more realistic and information-rich setting.

Participants were presented with a series of descriptions of targets who self-presented in a conformist or nonconformist way. Each description was accompanied by a portrait photograph and some basic demographic information about the person, to allow participants to build a mental image of the targets. Participants then rated each target according to how romantically attractive *they* found the target, and how romantically attractive they thought *others* would find the target.

Method

Participants and Design

Initially 118 participants completed the study, but 3 participants were excluded because they identified as exclusively same-sex attracted. The final sample comprised 115 undergraduate students (59.1% female) ranging from 17 to 37 years ($M_{age}=19.86$).

This study employed a 2 (participant gender) x 2 (gender of target) x 2 (conformity) mixed-measures design, with level of conformity manipulated within-subjects. Unlike Study 1, participants were exposed to either opposite-sex or same-sex targets. When participants were exposed to opposite-sex targets, the dependent measures were ratings of how attractive the target was, as well as how attractive they thought other people of their gender would find the target. When participants were exposed to same-sex targets, the dependent measures were ratings of how attractive they thought members of the opposite sex would find the target.

Procedure

Participants were presented with profiles of 20 people; each profile comprising a brief description of the person's personality accompanied by a photograph. The 20 profiles were arranged in pairs, and each pair of profiles described a conformist target and a nonconformist

target (see Figure 1 for an example). Half the participants viewed profiles of opposite-gender targets, and half viewed profiles of same-gender targets.

Each profile began with a neutral statement such as: “Jess has moved to study at university and lives in a sharehouse with three friends.” After this, a few sentences described the target as being either relatively conformist or relatively nonconformist. Each pair of target descriptions covered one of ten domains in which people can conform (or not). Examples of the domains covered by the profiles include: conforming with friends, conforming in public situations, conforming to others’ beliefs, conforming to social norms, conforming to parents, conforming in clothing choices, and conforming to the tastes and opinions of others.

Each description was presented along with basic demographic information (name, birthday, nationality) and a small portrait photograph. Portraits were obtained from casting database websites (e.g. www.interfaces.nl/) or from other researchers (with permission). All photographs were black-and-white and were cropped to ensure they looked as similar to each other as possible. Photographs and demographic information were counterbalanced across conformist and nonconformist targets, and the presentation of targets on the page was counterbalanced to avoid order effects. This ensured that each photograph was equally represented in the conformist and nonconformist conditions (and equally so within each of the 10 domains). It also ensured that, within each domain, participants received the conformist target first half the time, and the nonconformist target first half the time.

Measures

Participants presented with opposite-sex targets completed six items, all on the same scale (1=*strongly disagree*, 7=*strongly agree*). In the first three items they rated how attractive *they* found the targets. So a male participant evaluated the items: “I think [name of target] is romantically attractive”, “I would like to go on a date with [target]”, and “I think [target] would make a desirable girlfriend” ($\alpha=.92$). The next three items asked how

attractive *other people of their gender* would find the target. So a male participant would evaluate the items: “I think most men would find [target] romantically attractive”, “I think most men would like to go on a date with [target]”, and “I think most men would desire [target] as their girlfriend” ($\alpha=.97$).

Participants in the same-sex condition received only three items, asking how attractive *people of the opposite gender* would find the target. So a male participant would be faced with male targets, and would evaluate the items: “I think most women would find [target] romantically attractive”, “I think most women would like to go on a date with [target]”, and “I think most women would desire [target] as their boyfriend” ($\alpha=.95$).

Results and Discussion

As described earlier, Study 2 used 10 sets of dating profiles, each operationalizing different dimensions of conformity and nonconformity. Preliminary analyses examined whether there were micro-differences among the dimensions of (non)conformity in terms of what people find attractive. A series of 10 (profile domain) x 2 (level of conformity) x 2 (gender) mixed-design ANOVAs revealed no significant interactions between profile domain and either gender or conformity (all $ps>.30$). As a result, items across the 10 profile domains were collapsed together (see reliability coefficients above).

Personal attraction to conformist and nonconformist targets. Personal attraction to the targets was analyzed using 2 (participant gender) x 2 (conformity of target) mixed-design ANOVAs. In these analyses, only the participants who rated opposite-sex targets were included. Means are summarized in the first and fourth rows of Table 2.

Nonconformist targets were more desirable as romantic partners than conformist targets, $F(1,60)=5.00$, $p=.029$, $\eta_p^2=.08$, $CI[.043-.758]$. The interaction between conformity and participant gender was non-significant, $F(1,60)=0.03$, $p=.87$, $\eta_p^2=.00$; in other words, the preference for nonconformist targets was equally strong for male and female participants.

Do people know which targets the opposite gender find attractive? A 2

(participant gender) x 2 (target gender) x 2 (level of conformity) ANOVA was conducted on the full sample to determine whether men accurately predict what type of partner women prefer, and whether women accurately predict what type of partner men prefer. A significant three-way interaction emerged, $F(1,111)=4.90$, $p=.029$, $\eta_p^2=.04$. Examination of simple effects involved 1) comparing women's ratings of the attractiveness of male targets with men's ratings of how attractive they *thought* women would find male targets, and 2) comparing men's ratings of female targets with women's ratings of how attractive they *thought* men would find female targets.

In three of the four comparisons, the expectations matched closely to the reality. Specifically, men accurately estimated how attractive women would find both the conformist and the nonconformist men, and women accurately estimated how attractive men would find the nonconformist woman, all $F_s < 2.52$, all $p_s > .11$. There was one mismatch between perception and reality, however: Women overestimated how attracted men would be to the conformist women, $F(1,111)=4.67$, $p=.033$, $\eta_p^2=.04$, $CI[.033-.761]$.

We conducted a supplementary analysis to buttress the case that women believe men desire conformity in their partners more than men actually do. For this analysis we calculated difference scores between the ratings of the conformist target and the ratings of the nonconformist target, both in terms of people's own preferences for the opposite sex, and in terms of people's beliefs about what the opposite sex desire. We then conducted a 2 (participant gender) x 2 (target gender) ANOVA on the difference scores. Consistent with expectations, the interaction was significant, $F(1,111)=4.90$, $p=.029$, $\eta_p^2=.05$. The interaction was driven by the fact that the difference between what men prefer (differences across means in row 1 of Table 2) and what women *think* men prefer (row 3 of Table 2) was marginally significant, $F(1,111)=3.20$, $p=.077$, $\eta_p^2=.03$, $CI[-.033-.648]$. As expected, the equivalent

comparison for female targets was in the opposite direction and non-significant, $F(1,111)=1.83$, $p=.180$, $\eta_p^2=.02$, $CI[-.596-.113]$. This helps reinforce the case we are making: women believe that men desire conformist partners more than non-conformist partners, when in fact men's actual preferences indicate the opposite.

In sum, Study 2 confirmed the pattern of findings revealed in Study 1, complementing data on stated partner preferences with an experimental, revealed partner preferences study. Both men and women stated that they preferred conformity in a partner (Study 1), and their revealed mate preferences closely matched their preference (Study 2). In addition, our findings help explain the behavior of women in the studies of Griskevicius and colleagues (2006). The authors found that, when given a mating prime, women act in a more conformist fashion whereas men act in a less conformist fashion. Studies 1 and 2 showed that women *think* men prefer conformist partners. Additionally, Study 1 demonstrated that while men personally preferred nonconformist partners, they incorrectly assumed that other men preferred conformist women. Given these findings, it is understandable that women strategically conform when trying to attract a mate. Study 2 also showed that men *think* that women prefer nonconformist partners (accurately in this case). This suggests that men are likely to nonconform when trying to attract a mate. Collectively, Studies 1 and 2 suggest that the behaviour of women in response to a mating prime (Griskevicius et al., 2006) may reflect the (sometimes inaccurate) stereotypes that people have about the mate preferences of the opposite sex, rather than the actual mate preferences of the opposite sex.

Study 3

Study 3 extended Study 2 by examining (non)conformity preferences among men and women during an (ostensibly) live group interaction. This revealed preferences paradigm allowed us to observe mating preferences during real-time interpersonal interactions, rather than while viewing static dating profiles as in Study 2. The paradigm was adapted from the

same aesthetic preference task that Griskevicius and colleagues (2006) used (the exception being that we manipulated conformity as an independent variable, whereas Griskevicius and colleagues used the paradigm to measure conformity as a dependent variable). In Study 3 we focused exclusively on participants' own evaluations of the targets.

Method

Participants and Design

Study 3 included 111 university students (53.2% female), all of whom self-identified as either heterosexual or bisexual ($M_{age}=20.71$). The majority of the sample (62.2%) was Caucasian; the majority of non-Caucasians were Asian (31.5%). The majority of the sample (64.9%) was single; the remainder reported either being in a relationship with a boyfriend or girlfriend (31.5%), married (2.7%), or divorced (0.9%).

Participants were randomly allocated to the conditions of a 2 (participant gender) x 2 (level of conformity) between-groups design. In all cases participants evaluated an opposite-sex target. Unlike Studies 1 and 2, Study 3 had a substantial proportion of non-Caucasian participants. Because preferences for (non)conformity traits in men and women could plausibly be influenced by culture, the self-reported ethnicity of participants was dichotomized into "Caucasian" and "Other" and included in the design as an exploratory third independent variable. Thus, the experiment was a 2 (participant ethnicity) x 2 (participant gender) x 2 (level of conformity) between-groups design. Finally, the conformity condition comprised a much higher proportion of single participants (78.6%) than did the nonconformity condition (50.9%). For this reason, we dichotomized participants as either "single" (coded 0) or "other" (coded 1) and included this variable as a covariate.

Materials and Procedure

Participants were informed that they would be completing a study on art preferences and that they - along with other participants in different laboratories - would evaluate a series

of images. They were led to believe that the experiment would be conducted via an interactive ‘chat’ program, where each participant could view other participants’ ratings and comments. As displayed in Figure 2, the program was in fact a series of Microsoft PowerPoint slides, played in succession and designed to look like an interactive program. Prior to the task, participants’ photographs were taken using a digital camera and ostensibly uploaded onto the chat program (although in reality photos were simply deleted). Participants were then seated at a computer and the experimenter initiated the presentation.

Four images from the lifespan database of adult facial stimuli (Minear & Park, 2004) were presented in the style of an internet chat-room, and participants were led to believe that they were images of co-participants in the interaction. The images comprised people aged 18 to 29 years old who were pre-rated as moderately attractive on a 1-10 scale (images ranged from 5.40 to 6.60 on attractiveness). Male participants were presented with 4 female group members, while female participants were presented with 4 male group members. Of these, one group member varied in terms of the extent to which they converged with (conformity condition) or differentiated from (nonconformity condition) the other group members’ ratings. This group member was the person evaluated at the end of the experiment (the “target”).

Participants were presented with four black-and-white patterns. After the presentation of each pattern, participants rated the pattern (from 0-10) based on its visual appeal. Participants were always (apparently randomly) assigned to make their evaluations last (i.e., after the other four group members had rated). A *comment* box and a *score* box were included under each photograph so that participants could view the responses of each group member before making their own rating. For participants in the nonconformist condition, the target rated two of the patterns as clearly more visually appealing compared to the other group members (on average three points higher), and two of the patterns as clearly less visually

appealing compared to the other group members (on average three points lower). Conversely, for participants in the conformist condition, the target gave a score for every pattern that was within 0.3 of the scores of other group members. No comments were provided by the target group member until the final pattern, at which point the target stated: “Looks like I’m going to have to go against the crowd again!” (nonconformist condition), or “Look, I’m happy to go with the crowd again!” (conformist condition).

Following the pattern evaluation task, participants evaluated the target (seemingly selected at random) on a range of attributes. The target participant’s photo was displayed on the screen, and randomized so that each photo was equally likely to be associated with a conformist or nonconformist target. A summary table of all participant ratings was displayed before the questionnaire was administered, and the target’s ratings were highlighted in red.

Participants rated how interesting (1=*boring*, 7=*interesting*), warm (1=*cold*, 7=*warm*), intelligent (1=*not intelligent*, 7=*intelligent*), likeable (1=*strongly disagree*; 7=*strongly agree*), and friendly (1=*unfriendly*, 7=*friendly*) they found the target. These items were combined into a single scale of *positive regard* ($\alpha=.79$). To measure the extent to which the target was seen as a plausible romantic or sexual partner, participants rated the extent to which they found the target attractive (1=*unattractive*, 7=*attractive*), and rated the extent to which they agreed with the statements: “I would like to go on a date with this participant” and “I think this participant would make a desirable long-term romantic partner” (1=*strongly disagree*, 7=*strongly agree*). These items were combined into a scale labelled *romantic attraction* ($\alpha=.79$).

Results and Discussion

A 2 (participant gender) x 2 (conformity) x 2 (ethnicity) ANCOVA on *positive regard* revealed only a main effect of conformity, $F(1,102)=4.33$, $p=.040$, $\eta_p^2=.04$, $CI[.018-.736]$. Nonconformists ($M=5.02$) were regarded more positively than were conformists ($M=4.65$).

Participant gender and ethnicity had no significant effects, either alone or as an interaction with conformity (all F s < 1.29, all p s > .25). This effect was consistent with those found in Studies 1 and 2: Nonconformists were rated more positively than conformists, and this was the case for both male and female participants.

On *romantic attraction*, only an interaction between participant sex and conformity emerged, $F(1,102)=3.96$, $p=.049$, $\eta_p^2=.04$. For men, nonconformist women ($M=4.17$) were seen to be marginally more romantically attractive than conformist women ($M=3.50$), $F(1,102)=3.01$, $p=.086$, $CI[-.096-1.431]$. In contrast, there was no significant difference between how romantically attractive women found nonconformist ($M=3.27$) and conformist men ($M=3.63$), $F(1,102)=0.99$, $p=.323$, $CI[-.354-1.465]$. Another way of expressing this interaction is that men rated the nonconformist woman as more romantically attractive than women rated the nonconformist man, $F(1,102)=6.29$, $p=.014$, $CI[.187-1.597]$, but when the target was conformist, men and women were rated equally, $F(1,102)=0.13$, $p=.724$, $CI[-.866-.604]$. Ethnicity had no effect, either alone or as part of an interaction (all F s < 1.21, p s > .27).

In sum, we examined effects of conformity on positive regard and romantic attraction in the context of an ostensibly live group interaction. On positive regard, nonconformists were rated more highly than conformists, an effect that was equally strong for men and women. As such, this effect replicated the main effects on conformity found in Studies 1 and 2. On a measure that more specifically related to romantic intentions, the previously observed main effect only emerged for men rating a female target: Although female nonconformists were rated as (marginally) more romantically attractive than female conformists, the same was not true when the targets were male. This is the first time that we have seen an effect of conformity moderated by gender. The direction of this effect, however, is the opposite of that suggested by prevailing folk theories of what men and women find attractive. We found that nonconformity is especially attractive, but *only* when men are judging women.

Study 4

Although the methods of Studies 1-3 provide good experimental control over our research question, they were all conducted in laboratory contexts, relying on self-reports of attraction. It is an open question whether these “clean”, de-contextualized reports of preference would also hold up in the messy cut-and-thrust of real-world mating. Indeed, a critical indicator of whether people are attracted to conformist or non-conformist people is whether conformists and nonconformists are successful in their romantic endeavors. Therefore, Study 4 was designed to switch perspective, and test whether individual difference variables conceptually associated with conformity and nonconformity predict the real-world dating success of men and women.

One challenge in Study 4 is to identify individual difference variables that can be used as proxies for a general orientation toward conformity and nonconformity (to our knowledge there is no established scale that directly measures individual differences in willingness to conform). To do this, we treated “conformity” as an umbrella term incorporating themes of willingness to stand out, uniqueness, independence, and willingness to sacrifice self-interest in favor of the collective. We adapted four scales as predictors: measures of independent self-construal and idiocentrism, which focus on independence from situational pressures; and measures of interdependent self-construal and allocentrism, which focus on deference to the wishes of the collective (Singelis, 1994).

Of course, ratings of attractiveness might not reflect more serious romantic intentions, or long-term dating success. It may be that conformity confers short-term mating advantages for women, but long-term net detriments. In Study 3 then we wanted to test the stability of our effect across multiple short and long term indices of romantic success. As such, the criterion variables in this study were four dimensions of relationship success: casual dating, one-time sexual encounters, casual sex relationships, and committed/romantic relationships.

A further limitation of Studies 1-3 is that they all sample from Western nations. It is well-established that Western cultures tend to have an unusually strong emphasis on individualism and independence (Hofstede, 2001), and so the preference for non-conformity that has emerged in Studies 1-3 may not emerge in other populations. To balance this, Study 4 sampled from both Western cultures (US and UK) and from a collectivist culture (India) where one might expect that the preference for non-conformity found in Studies 1-3 could be reversed. If it is true that men have a preference for conformist women, it might be expected that this would be particularly evident in a country like India, which is still governed by relatively traditional gender roles. As such, Study 4 provides an especially sensitive test of the notion that men prefer conformist women.

Method

Participants

Indian participants were recruited through Amazon's Mechanical Turk and were compensated \$US1 for their time; non-Indian participants were recruited through an online research company. To be eligible, participants had to be either heterosexual or bisexual. Participants who did not fulfil these criteria were not directed to the main survey. There were 821 valid cases (55.7% male; $M_{\text{age}}=27.67$ years). Of these, 515 were from the US/UK and 306 were from India. Examination of the interaction between the nationality of the sample and the key predictors showed that the pattern of responses was equivalent between UK and US respondents, and so these participants were collapsed into a single "Western" category.

Materials

Independent self-construal. The Independent Self-Construal Scale is a 12-item sub-scale from the Self-Construal Scale (Singelis, 1994). This sub-scale measures the extent to which an individual sees themselves as having "a bounded, unitary, stable self that is separate from social context" (Singelis, 1994, p. 581), and was used as a measure of nonconformity.

Items from this scale include: “My personal identity, independent of others, is very important to me”, and “I act the same way no matter who I am with” (1=*strongly disagree*, 7=*strongly agree*; $\alpha=.86$).

Interdependent self-construal. The Interdependent Self-Construal Scale (Singelis, 1994) assesses the extent to which an individual thinks of themselves as someone who emphasises connectedness, relationships with others, and fitting in with others. This scale was used as a proxy for conformity. Items from this scale include: “It is important for me to maintain harmony within my group”, and “It is important for me to respect decisions made by the group” (1=*strongly disagree*, 7=*strongly agree*; $\alpha=.83$).

Idiocentrism. The Horizontal Individualism Scale is an 8-item sub-scale from the Vertical and Horizontal Individualism and Collectivism Scale (Singelis et al., 1995). Based on validation studies conducted by Triandis and Gelfand (1998) and following the procedure adopted by Chen, Wasti, and Triandis (2007), this scale was used as a measure of idiocentrism; the personality attribute that corresponds to the cultural attribute of individualism. This scale was designed to measure the extent to which participants thought of themselves as an autonomous individual. Items include: “I often do my own thing”, and “One should live one’s life independently of others” (1=*strongly disagree*, 7=*strongly agree*; $\alpha=.85$).

Allocentrism. Allocentrism is the personality attribute that corresponds to the cultural attribute of collectivism. Based on studies by Triandis and Gelfand (1998) and following the procedure of Chen et al. (2007), allocentrism was measured using the Vertical Collectivism Scale by Singelis and colleagues (1995). This scale was designed to measure the extent to which participants think of themselves as part of the collective and was used as a measure of conformity. Participants rated the extent to which they agree with 8 statements including: “I

usually sacrifice my self-interest for the benefit of my group” and “I hate to disagree with others in my group” (1=*strongly disagree*, 7=*strongly agree*; $\alpha=.85$).

Relationship success. The Dating History Questionnaire (DHQ; Urbaniak & Kilmann, 2006) was developed by to assess relationship success within four contexts: casual dating relationships, one-time sexual encounters, casual sex relationships (i.e., ongoing sexual relationships with little emotional commitment), and committed relationships (i.e., long term romantic relationships). Success in each context was assessed using three items (the wording of the items reported here is phrased as it would be for a male participant completing the casual sex scale): “About what percentage of the time that you wanted to have an ongoing casual-sex relationship with a woman did she actually agree to participate in this type of relationship?” (1=*less than 20% of the time*; 5=*80% of the time or more*); “Overall, how satisfied would you say you have been with your overall success in terms of being able to engage in casual-sex relationships?” (1=*very dissatisfied*; 5=*very satisfied*); and “Overall, how successful would you rate yourself in terms of being able to engage in casual-sex relationships as compared to most men?” (1=*much less successful than most men*; 5=*much more successful than most men*). All scales were reliable (α s .69 to .83).¹

Social desirability. It is possible that both ratings of (non)conformity and ratings of dating success could be influenced by social desirability considerations. Consequently, the Marlowe-Crown Social Desirability Scale-Short Form C (Reynolds, 1982) was included as a control variable. This 13-item scale includes items such as: “I’m always willing to admit it when I make a mistake” and “There have been occasions when I took advantage of someone”. Participants responded to these statements using a true/false scale, and it scored such that high scores indicate highly social desirable responding.

Results

Overview of analyses. In the DHQ scales, each of the 3 items included an option for participants to indicate that they had neither desired nor pursued a particular relationship type. Following standard procedure (Urbaniak & Kilmann, 2006), if participants reported that they had not desired or pursued a particular type of relationship they were excluded from that analysis. This resulted in the deletion of 270 participants from the casual dating analyses, 454 participants from the one-time sexual encounter analyses, 382 participants from the casual sex analyses, and 181 participants from the committed relationship analyses. This left between 367 and 640 valid responses for each analysis.

Separate regressions were conducted for each measure of relationship success. One cluster of analyses examined the predictive role of independent and interdependent self-construals, with both predictors entered simultaneously so we could disentangle the unique predictive power of each, and so interactions between the two types of self-construal can be detected. The second cluster of analyses used the same strategy to simultaneously examine the predictive role of allocentrism and idiocentrism.

In each regression, the main effects were included in the first step. This included main effects of gender (female=0, male=1), culture (Western=0, Indian=1), age, social desirability, and the (centered) predictor variables.² Two-way interaction terms were added in the second step and the three-way interaction term was added in the final step.

Independent and interdependent self-construals. Main effects of independent self-construal emerged on all four criteria. The higher participants scored on the independent self-construal scale, the more success they had in casual dating, $\beta=.21, p<.001, CI[.134-.344]$, one-time sexual encounters, $\beta=.14, p=.026, CI[.024-.262]$, casual sex, $\beta=.16, p=.005, CI[.051-.294]$, and committed relationships, $\beta=.10, p=.023, CI[.013-.210]$. Across all four relationship contexts, the interaction between gender and independence was non-significant (all $ps>.17$). There was a weak positive relationship between interdependent self-construal

and committed relationship success, $\beta=.09$, $p=.047$, $CI[.002-.231]$. Apart from that interdependent self-construal was not a reliable predictor of any of the criterion measures, either alone (all $ps>.24$) or as part of an interaction with gender (all $ps>.30$).

Interestingly, the interaction between independent and interdependent self-construals was significant for one-time sexual encounters, $\beta=.12$, $p=.030$, $CI[.015-.255]$, casual sex, $\beta=.15$, $p=.003$, $CI[.062-.311]$, and casual dating, $\beta=.10$, $p=.017$, $CI[.027-.225]$. In each case the pattern of results was the same. Where interdependence was high, the relationship between independence and success was positive and significant (one-time sexual encounters: $\beta=.35$, $p=.001$; casual sex: $\beta=.25$, $p=.011$; casual dating: $\beta=.26$, $p=.001$). Where interdependence was low, the relationship between independence and success was non-significant (all $ps>.26$).

There were no significant interactions featuring nationality.

Idiocentrism and allocentrism. Main effects of idiocentrism emerged on three criteria. The higher participants scored on the idiocentrism scale, the more success they had in casual dating, $\beta=.11$, $p=.011$, $CI[.017-.215]$, one-time sexual encounters, $\beta=.11$, $p=.049$, $CI[.001-.199]$, and committed relationships, $\beta=.11$, $p=.006$, $CI[.044-.228]$. Across all four relationship contexts, the interaction between gender and idiocentrism was non-significant (all $ps>.59$).

In contrast, the interaction between gender and allocentrism was significant on ratings of success in casual sex, $\beta=.21$, $p=.012$, $CI[.052-.444]$, committed relationships, $\beta=.14$, $p=.028$, $CI[.014-.386]$, and (marginally) on casual dating, $\beta=.13$, $p=.084$, $CI[-.025-.324]$. Analysis of simple slopes showed that in each case there was a positive effect of allocentrism for male participants (casual sex: $\beta=.20$, $p=.004$; committed relationships: $\beta=.20$, $p=.001$; casual dating: $\beta=.13$, $p=.035$). For female participants, in contrast, the effect of allocentrism was non-significant (all $ps>.73$). In the case of casual dating the interaction qualified a main

effect such that casual dating success was greater the more allocentric participants reported themselves to be, $\beta=.11$, $p=.025$, $CI[.015-.185]$. No other main effects of allocentrism emerged (all $ps>.12$).

The interaction between idiocentrism and allocentrism was significant for casual sex, $\beta=.15$, $p=.010$, $CI[.047-.282]$, and casual dating, $\beta=.11$, $p=.035$, $CI[.011-.214]$. Where allocentrism was high, the relationship between idiocentrism and success was positive and significant (casual sex: $\beta=.29$, $p=.004$; casual dating: $\beta=.20$, $p=.020$). Where allocentrism was low, the relationship between independence and success was non-significant (all $ps>.82$).

There was only one significant interaction featuring nationality: A nationality X allocentrism interaction on success in committed relationships, $\beta=.13$, $p=.045$, $CI[.028-.436]$. Consistent with cultural expectations, allocentrism predicted committed relationship success in India, $\beta=.22$, $p=.001$, but not in the West, $\beta=.04$, $p=.47$.

Discussion

In Studies 1-3 participants indicated a preference for nonconformity. In Study 4, people who displayed nonconformist personality traits also reported higher levels of romantic achievement and satisfaction. Proxies of non-conformity (independent self-construal and idiocentrism) were consistently related to all dimensions of relationship success. In contrast, proxies of conformity (interdependent self-construal and allocentrism) predicted success in just 1 of 8 analyses. None of the main effects were moderated by nationality, meaning that qualities of non-conformity were associated with success equally strongly among Indians as among Westerners. Thus, the relationship between success and non-conformity closely mirrored the reported preferences observed in Studies 1-3.

Of more direct relevance to the current question, gender moderated the effect of our predictors on 3 of the 8 analyses. But in each case the effect was the opposite of the assumed wisdom that conformity would be especially attractive in women. Indeed, the message from

these interactions was that qualities of allocentrism were predictive of success for men, not women. This was the case across indices of success ranging from short-term (casual sex and casual dating) to long-term (committed relationships). Overall, there was no evidence that traits traditionally associated with conformity led to greater relationship success for women (and some evidence for the notion that it is men who are more likely to benefit from conformity).

It is interesting to note that qualities of conformity were not irrelevant in terms of predicting attraction. Indeed, when it comes to predicting success in committed relationships, interdependent self-construal and allocentrism were both significant predictors (in the latter case this was only true in India). An important distinction in evolutionary psychology concerns long-term and short-term mating (Buss & Schmitt, 1993; Li & Kenrick, 2006), and it seems theoretically consistent that the few positive effects of conformity that were found were in the context of (long-term) committed relationships. Note, however, that this seems to be the case for men as well as women. It is therefore possible that the communal qualities that reflect conformity make for happy long-term relationships irrespective of gender. Further, the positive effects of *non*-conformity were found across all four dimensions of dating, suggesting that the general bias toward selection of non-conformist mates is context-independent.

There was also evidence that traits of conformity and non-conformity interacted in meaningful ways. In 5 of our 8 analyses, traits of non-conformity only predicted relationship success when they were contextualized also by traits of conformity. In sum, then, non-conformity was associated with relationship success, but in many cases this was only true when it was balanced by an ability to be sensitive to contextual influences and pressures. Although this was not predicted, it is broadly consistent with the finding that dominance is

associated with increased attractiveness for males, but only for those who are also agreeable (Jensen-Campbell, Graziano, & West, 1995).

Of course Study 4 is a correlational study, with all the interpretational challenges that this implies. One interpretation of the relationship between non-conformity and dating success – and the explanation that dovetails with the results of Studies 1-3 – is that these qualities are attractive in prospective mates and so drive dating success. Two sets of alternative explanations are also possible, however. First, the reverse causal path seems plausible: Dating success may make people more non-conformist. But to be able to defend the hypothesis that men prefer conformist partners and women prefer nonconformist partners, one would have to make the case that (a) the positive, reverse causal path between dating success and non-conformity overwhelms the direct negative influence of non-conformity on attractiveness, creating a positive overall relationship, and that (b) this reverse path only distorts the relationship for women (not for men). This is conceivable, but unlikely.

A second alternative explanation is that a third variable is driving both qualities of non-conformity and dating success. Note that two extraneous variables – age and social desirability – were controlled for in the current analysis. But another possibility is that people who are highly non-conformist simply exert more effort in the dating context (e.g., they ask more people on dates) and that it is this additional effort that is driving the relationship between non-conformity and success. Again, to defend the hypothesis that men prefer conformist women, one would have to make a convoluted case: that the impact of this third variable was so great that it reversed the “true” causal relationship between non-conformity and dating success, and that it does so exclusively for women.

Study 5

In Study 5 we sought to complete our research by taking into account the dyadic nature of romantic interactions. Accordingly, we designed a study that could account for both

actor and partner. Dyadic data is costly, and time-intensive to collect. However, peer/partner nominations can overcome these constraints, while still assessing real-life actor-partner effects. In Study 5 participants judged the level of conformity in both their current and ex-partners. They also rated their level of attraction and attachment to these targets. If the results of Studies 1-4 are robust, one would predict that the proposed series of results would emerge in an actor-partner setting; there should be a positive association between participants' ratings of their partners' levels of non-conformity and their desire for (or attachment to) that partner. Furthermore, one would expect that this relationship should be of comparable magnitude for men and women.

Method

Participants

Participants were recruited through Amazon's Mechanical Turk and were compensated \$US1. To be eligible, participants had to be either heterosexual or bisexual. There were 310 valid cases (59.7% male; $M_{\text{age}}=31.95$ years). Of these, 294 could identify an ex-partner, and 243 had a current partner.

Materials

Conformity and non-conformity. In Study 4 we used self-construals and measures of idiocentrism/allocentrism as proxies for conformity and non-conformity. Although these constructs tap into many of the dimensions that make up the broader construct of (non)conformity, on their own they may be seen as an imperfect proxy for our key construct. In Study 5, to provide targeted measures of orientation toward conformity versus non-conformity, we designed our own 11-item scale. The scale incorporated 6 items that tapped into conformity (e.g., "Adjusts how s/he acts to fit in with others"; "He/she tries to be as normal as possible"; "In a social situation she/he would conform to fit in") and 5 items that tapped into non-conformity (e.g., "Often expresses opinions that are different to those of

other people”; “He/she tries to stand out by being unconventional”; “Often behaves in a way that is different to others”). All items were responded to using 7-point scales (1=*not at all*; 7=*very much*).

These items were responded to twice: once on behalf of their current partner, and once on behalf of their “most recent ex-partner”. We initially envisaged the scales to be independent of each other, but the correlations were very high ($r_s > .44$, $p_s < .001$) and factor analysis suggested a single-factor solution. Thus, we reversed the non-conformist items and created a single 11-item scale such that high scores indicated high levels of non-conformity. This scale was highly reliable ($\alpha > .84$).

Attraction for target. Participants evaluated their current partner on a 5-item scale (for all items 1=*not at all*; 7=*very much*). Items included: “I am attracted to my partner”; “I have intense positive feelings about my partner”; and “I love my partner” ($\alpha = .93$). These 6 items were then repeated in relation to their ex-partner ($\alpha = .91$). To minimize the extent to which the ratings of the ex-partner were contaminated by bitterness about the break-up we measured and controlled for “who broke up with who” (1=*It was entirely my ex-partner's decision*; 5=*It was entirely my decision*) and how upset they were when the relationship broke up (1=*not at all*; 7=*extremely*). Note, however, that the effects were the same regardless of whether or not we controlled for these items.

Results and Discussion

Moderated regressions were performed with participant sex (1=male; -1=female) and non-conformity (centered) entered at the first step, and the interaction term entered at the second step. Participants’ attraction ratings of their current partner were unrelated to non-conformity ratings, $\beta = .05$, $p = .41$, $CI[-.049-.191]$. However, participants reported feeling more attracted to their ex-partner the more non-conformist their ex-partner was rated to be, $\beta = .18$, $p = .002$, $CI[.090-.369]$. Sex did not significantly moderate the relationship between

non-conformity and attraction toward either their current partners, $\beta = -.09$, $p = .16$, or their ex-partners, $\beta = .03$, $p = .65$.

The results broadly converged with expectations, and with the results of Studies 1-4. Participants were more attracted to their ex-partners the more they judged their ex-partners to be non-conformist. This effect was non-significant when making judgments about current partners, suggesting (perhaps not surprisingly) that conformity traits were swamped by other considerations in determining the extent to which people report love and attraction for their significant other.³ But the finding that is most relevant to the current question was the fact that the effects were not reliably moderated by participant gender. Statistically, men and women showed comparable associations between their judgments of (non)conformity traits in romantic partners and the extent to which they reported feeling attracted to those partners.

General Discussion

Studies 1-5 converged on the conclusion that nonconformity is more attractive than conformity for men and women. We investigated the issue thoroughly. Specifically, we asked people to report what they found most attractive (stated preferences), asked them to choose from non-conformist and conformist potential mates (revealed preferences), and asked them to report on current and ex-partners (actor-partner effects). In addition, we tested the extent to which self-reports of (non)conformity predicted mating and dating success in both Western and non-Western nations. For both men and women, nonconformity was seen to be attractive (Study 1), and opposite-sex targets were rated as more attractive when they were described as nonconformist (Study 2), or when they acted in a nonconformist way (Study 3). Furthermore, participants who possessed qualities typically associated with nonconformity (i.e., independent self-construal and idiocentrism) were generally more successful in sex, dating, and relationships (Study 4). Participants also reported more love and attraction for an ex-partner the more non-conformist they were remembered to be (Study 5).

Of more relevance to the current question, however, is whether these main effects were moderated by gender. In the majority of analyses they were not: The qualities of nonconformity that “work” for men in terms of attracting romantic partners tend to “work” equally well for women. But where effects of (non)conformity *did* have different effects for men and women, it was in the reverse direction to the assumed wisdom. Specifically, nonconformity was seen to be an especially attractive quality in women (Study 3), and allocentric orientations were more likely to be beneficial in dating success for men than for women (Study 4). In short, there is mixed support for the assumed wisdom that women prefer nonconformist men, and no support at all for the notion that men prefer conformist women.⁴

If this is the case, then why did the women in Griskevicius and colleagues’ (2006) study behave in a more conformist way after a mating prime? One answer can be extrapolated from Studies 1 and 2: Although men accurately predict that women prefer nonconformist partners, women mistakenly believe that men prefer conformist partners. So when faced with a mating prime, women behave in a way that they (mistakenly) presume will attract partners. In short, women buy into a stereotype of what men like in women – a stereotype that appears to be a myth.

The overall pattern of results emerged across multiple paradigms, using multiple conceptualizations of conformity. (Non)conformity was variously operationalized in terms of standing out from others, wearing non-conventional clothes, being independent, being unique, resisting convention, and resisting pressure from others. People evaluated these behaviors in abstract contexts (Study 1), in dating profile contexts (Study 2), in ostensibly live, interactive, small-group contexts (Study 3) and in dyadic contexts (Study 5). Studies 2-3, based on thin, slice-of-life perceptions, were balanced with retrospective accounts of behaviors (Study 4). Quasi-experiments and correlations (Studies 1, 4 and 5) were complemented by controlled experiments (Studies 2 and 3). Outcome measures included

perceptions of attractiveness (Studies 1-5), short-term dating intentions (Studies 2-4), and long-term “settling down” intentions and behaviors (Studies 3 and 4). Exclusively Western samples (Studies 1, 2 and 5) were complemented by a heterogeneous ethnic sample (Study 3) and by a cross-cultural sample (Study 4). Across all these methods, contexts, and measures, there was no evidence that men preferred conformity in women.

Griskevicius and colleagues (2006) advanced an evolutionary argument for why, when faced with a mating prime, their male participants behaved in a less conformist fashion and their female participants behaved in a more conformist fashion. This argument maintained that nonconformity is advantageous for males because (a) it is important for men to distinguish themselves from rivals in terms of attracting the attention of potential mates, and (b) nonconformity implies social dominance, willingness to take risks, independence, and assertiveness, all factors that signal good earning potential and higher social status (Brauer & Bhouris, 2006). For women, conversely, conformity is advantageous because men value partners who promote group cohesion (Griskevicius et al., 2006).

Although the current data do not correspond to this presumption, it is important to note that this does not rule out an underlying evolutionary mechanism. Rather, it could simply mean that the evolutionary forces are distal and have been overwhelmed by more proximal social forces; that the distal and proximal forces are intertwined so closely that they can no longer be separated; or that we are operating in evolutionarily novel conditions leading to flexibility in what is considered evolutionarily adaptive (Kenrick, Li, & Butner, 2003). This paper does not attempt to referee between the evolutionary and social role accounts, due to an acknowledgement that both theories recognize the interaction between evolved dispositions and social roles and structures (Archer, 1996; Eagly & Wood, 1999; Schaller, 1997).

It is possible, of course, that the assumption that men prefer conformist women *used* to be based in fact. A cursory glance at early twentieth century books on etiquette, courting, and “properness” paints a consistent picture: Women were expected to be submissive, modest, subdued, agreeable, and “supportive” of their husbands in terms of attitudes and behavior. Society expected “good” women to be background players to their husbands, and to violate that prescription by standing out, being different, or disagreeing with others would have resulted in social censure. It is not surprising that the assumption that men preferred relative conformity in women took hold, because the societal expectation for women to be conformist had been entrenched in the cultural psyche over centuries.

Since WWII, however, there have been two major sociocultural movements that challenged the notion that being conformist is a prescriptive expectation of women. First, the rapid acceleration of the feminist movement means that the social expectations of women (and men) have radically altered. A centerpiece of this movement is the proposition that women, like men, should be allowed to display agentic, competent, disagreeable, and dominant qualities without fear of social censure. Second, since the 1960s there has been a rapid growth of what some call the “cult of individualism” (Baumeister, 1991; Hargreaves, 1980). Increasingly, the notion of compromising one’s individual vision to “fit in with the crowd” is seen as immature and a sign of incomplete self-actualization (Bellah et al., 1985; Wallach & Wallach, 1983). Instead, children and adults alike are taught to do what is right for them; to hold firm in the face of peer pressure; to “let one’s light shine”. The word “conformist” has an increasingly pejorative tone to it, and popular culture celebrates nonconformity and independence from others as heroic and courageous (Hornsey & Jetten, 2004; Kim & Markus, 1999).

In some ways, then, the current data should not be surprising at all: If society tells us all that independence from social pressures is a sign of integrity and strong character, then

why would we expect anything other than a preference for nonconformity in our boyfriends *and* girlfriends, husbands *and* wives? The more slippery question is why women should believe the opposite; that is, why do women persist with the notion that men prefer conformist women?

The most likely answer seems that this is simply an example of cultural learning that has been slow to update with changing realities. Evolutionary theorizing by Boyd and Richerson (Boyd, Richerson, & Henrich, 2011; Richerson & Boyd, 2005) helps articulate why people might adopt cultural beliefs or practices that might contradict real environmental cues. They argue that the extraordinary ability of humans to expand and adapt to different geographical realities is not a function of exceptional cognitive ability or an enhanced ability for individuals to learn from environmental cues. Rather, they posit that our success in thriving in novel and hostile conditions is linked fundamentally to our ability to learn from others (a “cultural niche” hypothesis). Furthermore, this reliance on cultural learning is most pronounced when learning from environmental information is costly or inaccurate. Adaptive packages of cultural learning might be internalized or imitated even if individuals do not understand why elements are included in the design, or cannot assess whether alternative designs would be superior. In this way, cultural learning may trump environmental cues, first-hand experience, and personal intuition. In the context of changing contingencies then (e.g., where ideas about what is attractive in a woman change), the reliance on cultural learning can become maladaptive, leading to anachronistic mythologies about what men and women want.

In short, old cultural assumptions are slow to die, even when they are no longer grounded in reality. For both men and women romantic success and relationship satisfaction are core factors that determine health, happiness and wellbeing (Dush & Amato, 2005; Stack & Eshleman, 1998; Weiss & Aved, 1978). This means that such cultural assumptions, when wrong, have the potential to have a raft of negative downstream consequences. In this case,

for women, the consequence may be that they continue to adjust their behavior in front of men in a way that is counter-productive and impairs, rather than promotes, relationship success. Like the women in Griskevicius and colleagues' (2006) study, they may respond to dating contexts by emphasizing conformity, when they would be better served by being different and standing out.

And what of *Pride and Prejudice*? Jane, the beautiful conformist, did end up getting married to the eligible and personable Mr Bingley. However it was Elizabeth – fiery, anti-authority, and nonconformist – who drew men to her in droves, including Mr Darcy, the most sought after bachelor in the novel. With his large fortune, impeccable lineage, and palatial estates, Mr Darcy did not look twice at the acquiescent Jane. Instead he fought for Elizabeth, not despite her nonconformity, but perhaps (like the men in our studies) because of it.

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Notes

1. The original DHQ also contains items designed to test the overall quantity of success (e.g., how many casual sex partners they have had over the last month). We were mindful, however, of not confounding attractiveness with effort, and so have focused on items that are not explicitly quantity-based.
2. Age and social desirability were included as control variables, but the conclusions from the results were the same regardless of whether or not they were included in analyses. For the sake of comprehensiveness, note that age shared a small but significant amount of variance with three of the outcome variables, such that older participants typically reported less success. Social desirability was significantly positively associated with committed relationship success and marginally negatively related to success in one-time sexual encounters. Although the main effects of gender and nationality were not of theoretical interest, note that women reported more success than men on three of the outcome variables; and that Indians reported greater success in committed relationships than Westerners.
3. Analysis of individual items within the attraction scale revealed only one significant effect for current partners, and interestingly it was on the item most central to the scale. Participants endorsed the item “I am attracted to my partner” to a greater extent the more their current partner was perceived to be non-conformist, $\beta=.15$, $p=.022$, $CI[.046-.273]$.
4. It seems unlikely that the failure to support the original hypothesis can be credited to lack of statistical power. In each experiment there were > 25 participants in each cell, and the two correlational studies had a collective $N > 1100$. Furthermore, gender often *did* moderate the effects of conformity; just in a different direction to the original hypothesis.

Table 1

Study 1: Mean Level of Attraction to Conformity Characteristics in Potential Romantic Partners

Context	Male Participants	Female Participants
Own preferences	3.47 (0.63)	3.35 (0.54)
Beliefs about the preferences of men	4.13 (0.71)	3.95 (0.54)
Beliefs about the preferences of women	3.68 (0.59)	3.81 (0.61)

Note. Standard deviations are given in parentheses. Higher scores indicate greater preference for conformity characteristics.

Table 2

Study 2 Desirability of Conformist and Nonconformist Targets (Opposite-Sex Targets Only)

Measure	Conformist Target	Nonconformist Target
Males' own preferences	4.49 (0.82)	4.70 (0.83)
Males' beliefs about the preferences of other males	4.82 (0.87)	4.65 (0.78)
Females' beliefs about the preferences of males	4.88 (0.72)	4.79 (0.81)
Females' own preferences	4.10 (0.69)	4.28 (0.78)
Females' beliefs about the preference of other females	4.68 (0.61)	4.59 (0.63)
Males' beliefs about the preferences of females	4.40 (0.48)	4.34 (0.55)

Note. Standard deviations are given in parentheses. Higher scores indicate target is more desirable.

Figure Captions

Figure 1. Two of twenty dating profiles participants received in Study 2.

Figure 2. Interactive chat and stimulus presentation screenshot: Study 3.

PROFILE 1



Name: Jess

Birthday: 31st March

Occupation: University student

Nationality: Australian

Jess has moved to Brisbane to study at university, and lives in a share-house with 3 friends she met in one of her courses. Her father and mother are both high school teachers, and she has one younger sister who is in grade 12. Jess likes to stand out from the crowd, and enjoys expressing different opinions from her friends, as well as making decisions for herself. In group situations she is not easily convinced to change her ideas, and often does her own thing rather than fit in with the group.

PROFILE 2





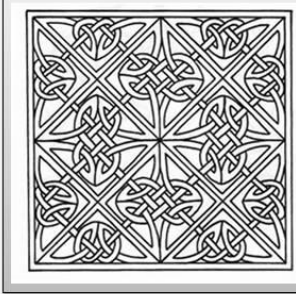


Name: Amy

Birthday: 12th Nov

Occupation: University student

Nationality: Australian

Amy has lived in Brisbane all her life and now goes to university a few suburbs away from her childhood home. She has three brothers, and they were all brought up mainly by her mother, as her father is an airline pilot. Amy has always liked hanging out with her family and friends, and likes being part of the group. She is quite happy to go along with what others are doing, and to change her opinions and preferences rather than cause too much fuss.

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036	003	Instructions
		
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